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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2084
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 001186

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EEB, DRL
PLEASE PASS TO USTDA DAN STEIN
ENERGY FOR EKIMOFF/THOMPSON
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/09/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [EPET](#) [ETRD](#) [TX](#)
SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: BERDIMUHAMEDOV EXPRESSES
APPRECIATION FOR THE UNITED STATES-TURKMENISTAN
RELATIONSHIP IN SEPTEMBER 3 MEETING WITH DAS KROL

REF: A. ASHGABAT 1157
[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 0807
[1](#)C. ASHGABAT 0826
[1](#)D. ASHGABAT 1155

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: During a friendly meeting lasting almost two hours September 3 with Deputy Assistant Secretary George Krol, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov:

-- stressed the importance of the bilateral relationship, including commercial ties and cooperation.

-- encouraged U.S. companies to come to Turkmenistan and work without using middlemen.

-- detailed the challenge of providing Turkmen young people with a quality education that will prepare them for future employment as well as encouraging foreign investment so that there will be sufficient employment opportunities.

-- reiterated Turkmenistan's position that it has economic/commercial, but not political ties with Iran.

-- raised Turkmenistan's desire for a UN resolution to promote pipeline security. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Deputy Assistant Secretary George Krol met September 3 with President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to discuss bilateral relations and regional issues. The meeting lasted nearly two hours. Berdimuhamedov noted the good relations between the United States and Turkmenistan and excellent cooperation in the areas of education, health, and security, among others. He thanked the Peace Corps for the tremendous work it has done in Turkmenistan. Berdimuhamedov detailed U.S.-sponsored travel by Turkmen officials, including military officials. He recalled fondly his visit to New York for the UNGA in 2007 and his meetings with President Bush. He enjoyed meeting and working with various U.S. officials, including the Secretary,

Assistant Secretary Boucher, and Senator Lugar. Berdimuhamedov said it is clear there is mutual understanding between our two countries. There is much to learn from the United States.

APPRECIATION OF U.S. BUSINESSES AND PRODUCTS

13. (C) Berdimuhamedov said Turkmenistan offers many international tenders, especially in construction, oil and gas industry, and textile industry. Turkmen factories produce clothing for U.S. brands. In agriculture, Turkmenistan purchases Case New Holland and John Deere tractors and combines. Boeing, Caterpillar, and General Electric are also successful here. He said U.S. companies should just come to Turkmenistan and work and not use middlemen.

TURKMENISTAN HAS POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES

14. (C) Berdimuhamedov said after 17 years of independence, it is clear that Turkmenistan still has a lot to do. The country has a great deal of economic potential, especially in oil and gas, transportation, textile, and construction spheres. Nevertheless, the country has a lot of youth and they want to live according to U.S. and European standards. Therefore, it is necessary to provide them with a good education, including access to language study, and to encourage foreign investment in order to provide employment opportunities. English is the universal language. Exchanges, such as the U.S. Flex program help Turkmen young

ASHGABAT 00001186 002 OF 003

people develop their potential and provide them with skills to promote economic development in the country.

15. (C) Even with opening up to the world, Berdimuhamedov said, Turkmen cannot forget their culture and traditions. This is necessary to raise a child to be a good person and for people to create families.

AFGHANISTAN

16. (C) Berdimuhamedov emphasized that Turkmenistan is a neutral country. Turkmenistan is in a dangerous neighborhood, bordering Afghanistan and Iran. Recognizing the need, Turkmenistan has taken steps to help Afghanistan by providing places for Afghan students in Turkmen pedagogical institutes and cooperating to provide them with energy. Berdimuhamedov pointed to the electrification project with Afghanistan and that the electricity will be provided to the Afghans practically for free. Now, Turkmenistan is constructing schools, and special health centers for mothers and children. The Afghan people need education and need to be able to feed themselves.

17. (C) Berdimuhamedov pointed to narcotics as one of the problems with which Afghanistan is grappling and said narcobusiness is huge. In his opinion, Afghans need to change their mentality. During his official visit to Afghanistan, he saw a field with green, growing plants. President Karzai told him that the plants were opium. Berdimuhamedov acknowledged that Turkmenistan is used as a transit country for these drugs, which also transit Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The transit of drugs is growing. Everyday smugglers are caught on the border with drugs. Turkmenistan has given \$5 million dollars to the State Agency for Counternarcotics to improve the technical basis for fighting drugs, including the purchase of vehicles that can be used in rough and mountainous terrain and UAVs. Turkmenistan actively cooperates with the UN Office of Drug Control (UNODC).

TAPI AND PIPELINE SECURITY

18. (C) Turkmenistan hopes to earn \$1 billion dollars annually once TAPI is constructed and operational. Nevertheless,

security is a concern. Turkmenistan would be happy if Afghanistan and Pakistan were stable, but that is not the case. This is why Turkmenistan has approached the UN Center for Preventative Diplomacy regarding a UN resolution on pipeline security. Berdimuhamedov pointed to the conflict in Georgia and the disruption of pipelines there as further evidence of why such a UN resolution is needed. He said he felt sorry for the Azeris, who lost a great deal due to the disruption of the BTC pipeline. Security is basic, and this issue is important for both producers, such as in Central Asia, and consumers, like the European countries.

IRAN

¶9. (C) Like with Afghanistan, Turkmenistan has historic and cultural ties with Iran. Berdimuhamedov stressed that two countries have economic/commercial ties and not political ties. He spoke about the importance of land routes, including through Iran. There are good roads through Iran and shipping through Iran is cheaper than air transport. Turkmenistan sold gas to Iran for many years, but stopped providing gas, when the Iranians stopped paying. Then experts met, discussed the issue, the Iranians paid, and Turkmenistan resumed the gas. It was purely an economic question.

ASHGABAT 00001186 003 OF 003

OIL AND GAS

¶10. (C) Berdimuhamedov said Turkmenistan supports a diversification of pipelines, but the issue of delimitation of the Caspian needs to be resolved (Ref A). He reiterated the Turkmen position of selling gas at the border. The Russians built the pipelines, which is why they go north. Nevertheless, Turkmenistan has a formula to charge for the gas. If Turkmenistan does not get the price it wants, it is willing to turn the gas off. The Gaffney-Kline audit, which will be released shortly, will answer the question of how much gas is available in South Yoloten.

HUMAN RIGHTS

¶11. (C) Berdimuhamedov noted that the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights, which is led by Shirin Akhmedova, a professional lawyer, is helping to change the mentality in the country regarding human rights issues. He said the country has done a lot regarding human rights. For example, the constitution is being revised, credit is available at one percent interest, laws are being revised, new housing is being built, and there were four prisoner amnesties over the past year.

¶12. (C) Clearly irritated, Berdimuhamedov mentioned the letter he had received from the President of Columbia University regarding Sazak Durdymuradov, a teacher and RFE/RL reporter, who was detained in a psychiatric facility for two weeks in June (Ref B). The letter demanded that Durdymuradov be released. Berdimuhamedov said that the man was never in prison, but was in a psychiatric facility following a dispute with his brother. Berdimuhamedov said that everyone has a family, and what family does not have issues. It was nothing odd. However, it was clear that the President of Columbia University did not know what he was talking about since the man had been released the month before the letter arrived (Ref. C). It was not correct to write to the head of state.

¶13. (C) COMMENT: The nearly two-hour-long meeting was warm and friendly. Berdimuhamedov was particularly delighted when DAS Krol began their conversation with a short address in Turkmen (Krol also delivered his post-meeting press remarks in Turkmen, much to the astonishment and pleasure of the presidential staff). Throughout the discussion, Berdimuhamedov emphasized his desire to maintain a strong partnership relationship with the United States as well as

his country's gratitude for cooperation to date. Nevertheless, he stressed that Turkmenistan is a neutral country that maintains mutually beneficial relations with its neighbors and does not want to be drawn into conflicts between other countries (Ref D).

¶14. (U) DAS Krol has cleared this cable.
CURRAN